

The morning news reported John Ashcroft's confirmation as Attorney General. All the hullabaloo about Mr. Ashcroft disregarded the fact that he was from Missouri, a state of such high intelligence that the electorate voted in a dead governor in November. Such prescience and discrimination impressed us down in Texas. We often don't discover our worthies are dead until they take office.

Mr. Ashcroft's opposition submitted over 200 questions to be answered in what might be the most detailed examination of character yet to come from that noble sounding board of holy venue. The primary concern in any nominee's character in these parts involves only one question: Has the subject harbored illegal aliens? Living so close to Mexico, we know how serious a crime it is against society to feed wetbacks, not to mention employing wetbacks to help mark calves or shear sheep.

Please reopen the case of Linda Chavez, Mr. Bush's first choice for Secretary of Labor. Her neighbor fingered her for sheltering a battered Guatemalan woman without checking her immigration status. After the committee nailed Mrs. Chavez, she withdrew, saying, "I'd do the same thing again." Mrs. Chavez's trouble probably goes way back in her heritage. I know if, say, Granny Chavez belonged to my mother's generation, she fed hungry people without checking passports or birth certificates. If the foot soldiers lingered at Mother's ranch for more than an hour after

eating, she served a second meal. She gave the footsore rides to town. She doctored the sick and the weary. Hatless souls left wearing one of my stepdad's caps, and all parties departed carrying a lunch.

Influence of the cabinet investigations seeped down to the men I meet for lunch on Tuesdays every week. Attrition vacated a seat a few weeks ago. At first my colleagues treated finding a new member the way they weigh whether to order the fried shrimp salad, or the tortilla oil of chili powder soup. Our founder and organizer, a prominent pediatrician and fiery political activist, set a time limit on submitting a nominee, including presenting a brief defending the case.

The good doctor runs a tight table. Rebuttals from the floor are ignored. He allows us two minutes to tell any story from "Homer's Iliad" to reviewing a *Reader's Digest* article on "Life's Most Unforgettable Moments." So far, the most careful observance to this "gag rule" is a story a member started 24 months ago about roping calves in Montana that drifted into a scene set in Hollywood, California. Appreciate that a story of such magnitude of space, broken into two-minute segments as slow as we talk in the shortgrass country, puts telling the tale on par with summarizing Tennessee William's play "The Glass Menagerie" in one hour.

Before we acted, I suggested we overlook the nominee's shortcomings and test his listening talent. Under the two-

minute limit per member for eight members, one slate takes 16 minutes. Counting overtimes and filibustering, plus the time lost hunting for waiters and eating, working in two rounds is difficult, especially if Doc or the retired Senator greet every person who so much as pokes their head in the dining room. (Doc, by nature of his craft, greets the young parents; the Senator, by long habit, greets all persons regardless of age or citizenship status. His honor is just as apt to be bowing to an ol' gal wearing a kimono from Japan as he is to be hugging some old sister fresh off the farm east of Angelo.)

We have gone so far as to list the following standards for new membership: a spotless record on paying social security to baby sitters, no outstanding claims by the postal department for insufficient postage or overdue box rent, a certificate that all library fines are clear, proof of pardon from corporate court for parking violations, perfect attendance records for church and secondary school (no tardy slips), balanced closing accounts for any fiduciary positions, (class or boy scout treasurer) or any combination of the above violations against society, i.e. double parking in front of the post office to buy stamps for under-posted mail.

I am looking forward to interviewing new prospects. Too bad Mrs. Chavez wasn't investigated by my mother. I never understand how those hypo-congressional-crites can face the

cameras and judge their fellow man. Looks like their
specialty should be rating vocal inspired windstorms...